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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BRIDGETOWN 000060

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SUBJECT: DOMINICA'S ILLEGAL MIGRANT PROBLEM

Classified By: DCM Mary Ellen T. Gilroy for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Dominica is struggling to cope with increasing numbers of illegal migrants from Haiti and the Dominican Republic, an unprecedented situation for this small-island state that is one of the poorest countries in the Caribbean. The migrants typically use Dominica as a transit point to reach other destinations in the region, but increasing numbers have remained to find employment. Women from the Dominican Republic have been migrating to Dominica to work as prostitutes, although authorities do not believe that trafficking has occurred. After several years of seeming inaction, the Government of Dominica has recently taken steps to stem the flow of migrants. The Government will, however, have to overcome suspicions that in the past it allowed smuggling to occur because of the cash such a lucrative trade brought to a struggling economy or that prominent Dominicans may have personally profited from this criminal activity. End summary.

Migration to Rather Than from Dominica

12. (U) Illegal migration to Dominica has become an issue of increasing concern in this poor country that has typically been a place that people migrate from rather than to. Haitians form the largest group of migrants, many of whom use Dominica as a means to transit to other, wealthier islands in the Caribbean. Increasing numbers, however, have remained in Dominica to find employment. A smaller number of migrants either transiting or staying in the country have come from the Dominican Republic (DR), with women from the DR filling the ranks of Dominica's growing commercial sex trade. While neither migration has yet to cause serious social problems, Dominica authorities fear that the involvement of local people in migrant smuggling and prostitution could lead to an increase in other forms of criminal activity, as well as a rise in cases of HIV/AIDS.

Haitian Migration

13. (U) Haitians have been migrating to and through Dominica for the past ten years, although they began arriving in large numbers in 2003, according to Government officials. While none of the officials could give an accurate number of

Haitians who have arrived in Dominica, one recent estimate put the number at more than 11,000 arriving in this country of only 70,000 people since 2003. Most of the Haitians entered Dominica legally then used it as a transit point to reach other Caribbean islands, particularly the neighboring French islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique. Government officials believe that growing numbers of Haitians have chosen to remain in Dominica to work illegally for low wages in agriculture and construction. Their ability to live in the country is facilitated by the fact that many Dominicans speak a French-based patois similar to Haitian Creole.

Government Unable to Stem the Flow

¶4. (U) Dominica made a limited effort in 2003 to control the number of Haitians entering the country by instituting a policy that required them to pay a US\$400 deposit to immigration officials upon arrival, which could only be collected upon their documented departure. Of the over 11,000 Haitians who paid the deposit, only 100 are believed to have collected their money. When the deposit policy failed to dissuade Haitians from traveling to Dominica, the Government drew up a visa regime that was to have gone into effect in December 2005. The plan was put on hold in response to concerns that such a measure would restrict the freedom of movement of CARICOM nationals. Although Dominica immigration officers could deny entry to Haitians they believe are entering the country with the intention of illegally traveling elsewhere or remaining to work, they rarely do so.

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Is the Government Complicit in Smuggling?

¶5. (U) Domestic critics have castigated the Government of Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit for its failure to address the smuggling of migrants through Dominica. Some have gone so far as to suggest that the Government has allowed smuggling to occur because of the money it brings to this economically distressed county. Critics have charged that seemingly everyone on the island but the police and other officials seem to know that the center of organized smuggling is Portsmouth, a town that is represented in Parliament by Ian Douglas, a close advisor to PM Skerrit who became Attorney General last year.

¶6. (C) DAO reported in 2003 that a high-level Dominica law enforcement official said that Ian Douglas's family profited from migrant smuggling and that Douglas had personally intervened to prevent the police from investigating a suspected smuggling network. The official also alleged that Henry Dyer, Dominica's Attorney General at the time, had told the police that they should not apprehend illegal migrants in Dominica. DAO commented in the report that it had "no hard evidence" to support these allegations.

Haitian Smuggling Network

¶7. (SBU) An international smuggling network has developed to bring Haitians to Dominica, a high-ranking police official recently explained to Poloff. Haitians are believed to pay a facilitator to get them to Dominica, where many arrive legally via commercial airlines. A favored carrier is Western Airlines, which flies a 20-seat plane from Haiti to Dominica twice a week. The police official opined to Poloff that the sole purpose of Western Airlines flights to Dominica is to facilitate migration and expressed frustration with his Government's apparent inaction against the carrier.

18. (U) From Dominica, the Haitians are smuggled by small vessels to other Caribbean islands at a cost of several thousand dollars per person. Boats can often be heard leaving ports, fishing villages and remote coastal areas under cover of darkness. Like illegal migrants throughout the world, Haitians typically face a perilous journey. In July 2005, for example, the St. Maarten coast guard rescued 52 Haitians from a small boat that was taking on water and had been abandoned by its captain. The Haitians were deported back to Dominica, the country from which they departed. The captain was eventually caught and has been charged in Dominica with the illegal transport of migrants. The Government has said this is only the first prosecution in what will be an ongoing effort to crack down on local smugglers. (Note: If Haitian migrants have traveled from Dominica as far as St. Maarten, it is possible that they could reach the U.S. Virgin Islands or Puerto Rico. End note.)

On to France

19. (U) The town of Portsmouth is a favored departure point from Dominica, in part, because of its location on the northern part of the island where it is only a short distance from Guadeloupe. Since Guadeloupe and nearby Martinique are French departments, when the Haitians arrive on these islands they have technically landed not in overseas colonies but in France proper. The ease with which Haitians have been reaching the French islands led France and Dominica to sign an agreement in October 2005 to improve the sharing of intelligence and cooperation between their coast guards.

"Spanish" Prostitutes from the Dominican Republic

110. (U) The migration to Dominica from the Dominican Republic is on a smaller scale than that from Haiti, but works in a similar manner. The one difference is that women from the DR have been coming to Dominica to work in the country's growing

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commercial sex trade. Many of the women who arrive from the DR have fair complexions and are referred to by Dominicans as "Spanish," which supposedly makes them particularly appealing to their customers. Most of the women come to Dominica voluntarily, knowing they will be prostitutes, according to Government officials. Some are believed to have arrived hoping for different forms of employment but turned to prostitution after being unable to find other work. Government officials who spoke recently to Poloff believe there is an organized network that recruits women in the DR to work as prostitutes in Dominica. The officials said, however, that they have seen no evidence that these women have been coerced or that trafficking has occurred.

Government Criticized Over Prostitution

111. (U) Domestically, the Government has received a great deal of criticism for its inability to arrest providers or consumers of commercial sex, which is illegal, and the police force's efforts to break up prostitution rings have so far been ineffective. A police official explained to Poloff that in such a small society as Dominica's, where everyone knows everyone else, it is virtually impossible to place police officers undercover to infiltrate brothels or other organized crime activities. Meanwhile, community leaders have offered stinging critiques of a Dominican society that they say is increasingly engaging in illicit behavior that could lead to a rise in cases of HIV/AIDS. Under increasing pressure to deal with migrants from the Dominican Republic, particularly prostitutes, in December 2005 Dominica began requiring people

from the DR to have visas to enter the country.

Why Come to Dominica?

¶12. (U) A puzzling aspect of Dominica's current migration situation is why people from Haiti or the DR would go to one of the poorer countries in the Caribbean to find employment. According to several knowledgeable observers, despite the fact that the country typically has a 25 percent unemployment rate, jobs in strenuous occupations such as agriculture and construction often go unfilled. Many Dominicans, particularly idle young men, are loath to take such work. The observers explained to Poloff that the high unemployment rate and other gloomy economic data obscure the fact that extended families can typically subsist on food produced on the small plots of land they own with supplemental cash brought in by a few wage earners. This leaves an opening for desperate migrants who are willing to do hard work for low pay while escaping the everyday violence and poor security conditions in Haiti.

¶13. (C) Comment: The Government of Dominica's recent effort to stem the tide of migrants belies the fact that it had previously done little about the situation. Only increased criticism of the Government and growing fears of social problems associated with the migrants appear to have made PM Skerrit and his administration pay more attention to the matter. It is still too early to tell if the now seemingly energized Government will be successful in dealing with its migrant problem, although the meager resources available to its coast guard and police suggest that Dominica has a difficult task ahead. In addition, the Government, through its actions, will have to overcome skeptics who may believe that officials allowed smuggling to occur or even had a hand in this criminal activity.
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